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April 30, 1958

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Dear Mr. Secretary of State:

I appreciated receiving your letter of April 22, referring to our recent discussions here in Washington. I fully agree that personal talks of that kind are of very great value, and I hope we shall soon have an occasion for a further exchange of views.

I only regret that we were not able to cover, during our discussions, the subject of your letter to me of April 22. I have read your letter with great interest and I am glad of this opportunity to outline to you in turn my thinking on the question of arming the forces of the German Federal Republic with modern weapons. Some of the considerations I will touch on have already been discussed in talks which Ambassador Robertson and members of his staff have recently had with some of my associates in the Department, but I should like to summarize the entire situation as I see it.

As you indicate, the question of the arming of the Federal Republic's forces with nuclear weapons is now being much discussed publicly and in the press. I have been struck by the fact that in this discussion little attention has been paid to the actual NATO proposals and procedures in this field. There has been no suggestion that nuclear warheads and bombs should be placed in the custody of German forces, or that of any of the other continental members of NATO. It was and is the aim of the NATO atomic stockpile plan, first suggested by the French Foreign Minister last May, to assure the availability of nuclear warheads and bombs to NATO forces in time of emergency, without having control and custody of such nuclear components pass into additional hands. I have the impression

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The Honorable  
Dr. Sidney E. Smith,  
Secretary of State  
for External Affairs,  
Ottawa, Canada.

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impression that the Alliance as a whole felt this was a desirable solution of an admittedly difficult problem, and the Germans in particular have indicated their satisfaction with it. It is important, I think, for the NATO countries to stress, both to their own publics and to the Soviets, the carefully worked-out arrangements that are envisaged, and the assurances that such arrangements offer against any use of nuclear weapons except to repel aggression in accordance with agreed NATO strategy.

The Germans have indicated of course that they do wish to equip their forces with modern weapons, including those which have the capability of being fitted with nuclear warheads or bombs as well as conventional warheads or bombs -- the so-called "dual-capable" delivery vehicles. Such vehicles cover a wide range of equipment, including for example modern fighter-bombers, which can carry atomic bombs. Thus, as a practical matter, if the armed forces of a country were to be deprived of the capability of delivering nuclear warheads and bombs, such a prohibition would have to cut deep into the field of conventional weapons in order to include all "dual-capable" vehicles. This would seem to us to be impracticable and to pose unacceptable military risks. For Germany to possess dual-capable weapons but to be denied access to elements of the NATO atomic stockpile in Germany, thus placing the Federal Republic's forces in the position of being the only forces in Germany without access to nuclear weapons in the event of emergency, would seem equally impractical.

I thought it useful to review these general considerations as a background to a discussion of the political problem you raise, since use of the term "arming Germany with nuclear weapons" does not clearly bring out several pertinent and important factors, particularly the safeguards that NATO planning offers against the possibility of any aggression from our side.

The question has been raised as to the consideration given in NATO to the political advisability of including Germany within the arrangements being worked out to give an atomic capability to other NATO forces. It is my impression that there has been extensive consideration of this matter from the political as well as from the military point of view. It has been generally accepted that members of the Alliance have equal rights and obligations, and that discrimination against one country in a basic matter of defense could well seriously weaken the principle of collective security in NATO. To review only the recent past, last May, at the Ministerial meeting

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meeting in Bonn, the North Atlantic Council noted that the USSR had launched a campaign designed to induce public opinion in various member countries to oppose the modernization of defense forces. The Council agreed that one of the objects of this campaign was to ensure for Soviet forces a monopoly of nuclear weapons on the European Continent, and that no power can claim the right to deny to the Alliance the possession of the modern arms needed for its defense. The recent statements of Mr. Mikoyan, during his visit to the Federal Republic, seem to leave no doubt that it remains one of the prime aims of Soviet policy, in its efforts to divide and weaken the Alliance, to attempt to prevent Germany from playing its full part in NATO's defensive plans.

In view of Germany's importance in NATO defensive strategy, it was evident that a policy of modernizing NATO defense forces could not, in practice or logic, exclude Germany. The Heads of Government meeting last December reemphasized the views expressed by the Council in May and initiated several specific steps in the modernization process. Thus, I think it fair to say that NATO's military planning, in MC-70 and other documents, regarding the modernization of all NATO forces including those of Germany, has been carried out pursuant to a clear political directive.

It is against this political background that Chancellor Adenauer obtained last month a majority vote in Parliament for the proposition that the armed forces of the Federal Republic must be so equipped with the most modern weapons that they are in a position to meet the obligations which the Federal Republic has taken upon itself in the framework of NATO. The Bundestag again stressed Germany's interest in achieving general controlled disarmament.

I should like now to turn to the specific suggestion you discuss in your letter, the possibility that the West might offer to delay Germany's participation in the process of ensuring that the most modern weapons are available to NATO forces, in return for Soviet concessions, on the understanding that Germany would so participate if progress were not made in a year or so on the solution of outstanding problems.

The foremost practical consideration I see is that the Chancellor has already engaged the prestige of his Government on the question of modern weapons. It seems evident that the German Government has now concluded that German forces must have a nuclear capability and that they

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they should not be in an inferior position to the forces of other countries in Germany. In these circumstances it would seem that, even if such action were desirable, it would not be politically feasible for him to modify that stand without serious weakening of his position and that of NATO in Germany.

Secondly, and more important from the standpoint of policy, I should not think that any important aspect of NATO's defensive plans should be treated as something to be speeded up or slowed down depending upon Soviet tactics at any particular time. NATO has charted for itself what I conceive to be the only possible course -- to maintain and modernize its defenses at the fastest practicable rate, and simultaneously to seek to negotiate with the Soviet Union a general controlled and inspected disarmament agreement. If the suggestion under discussion were put to the Soviets, the result might well be not Soviet concessions but rather intensified Soviet propaganda designed to bring about unilateral measures by the West which would weaken our position. Further, it would be extraordinarily difficult to define the time and circumstances under which the arming of German forces with modern weapons, once suspended, would be resumed -- how the "lack of progress on the solution of outstanding problems" would be measured. Such a process of delay and then resumption might imply that the West believed the international situation had suddenly sharply deteriorated at the time of resumption and thus might seriously heighten tensions at that time.

It is also suggested that postponement of Germany's participation in NATO's plans for developing a nuclear capability would not involve any undue military risks. While it is true that certain German missile units are not to come into being until 1959, it is my understanding that the build-up of the German forces has already approached the point where a large number of planning decisions cannot be delayed. It seems that if the modern weapons units required by NATO military plans in 1959 and subsequent years are to come into being, the German Government must begin to contract now in other countries for the necessary equipment, since the production "lead-time" is usually a lengthy one. Thus, deferring these planning decisions could in fact introduce a delay that would not be made good in the future.

Finally, I doubt that any action by Germany or the West of the nature contemplated would have the effect of hardening the already rigid Soviet position on German reunification and European security. They have as yet shown no disposition to examine seriously the positions

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positions put forward by the West at Geneva in 1955, which offer the Soviets a genuine measure of security against the possibility of future aggression by Germany. Instead, the only schemes that the Soviets advocate are those which could fatally weaken the Western defenses, such as "atom-free" zones and the linking of outer space control with the liquidation of overseas bases.

I fully recognize that the Soviets, at a time when they feel it necessary to tighten their political control over Eastern Europe, are using the spectre of a Germany armed with nuclear weapons as a propaganda weapon to this end. I think NATO can and should do more to make known the purely defensive nature of its military planning and the safeguards that NATO offers against any possibility of misuse by one of its members of nuclear weapons. But I do not feel that this should deflect us from the course of action that NATO has chosen. Even if the forces of the Federal Republic were not equipped with modern weapons, the Soviets would undoubtedly concentrate their propaganda upon the existence of any German forces at all, or on the presence of other NATO forces in Germany. This is in fact the process we are now witnessing, with the Soviets simultaneously propagandizing against the presence of British, Canadian and U.S. forces in Europe, NATO bases in other countries, the rearmament of Germany, and so on. To delay or give up any important element of NATO's defenses would, I fear, invite still further Soviet pressures in these directions.

I think I need not assure you of the determination of the United States to continue to seek the reunification of Germany, a dependable system of European security, and a controlled disarmament agreement. If Germany should be reunified in conjunction with a system of forces and arms limitations in Europe, it seems clear that a large part of the burden of defending the German area, whether or not she is a member of NATO, would have to fall on German forces. In the absence of general disarmament arrangements of some significance, the USSR would continue to be in a position to maintain a nuclear-equipped striking force of massive proportions against Central Europe, and it does not seem that to deprive German forces of the means of effective retaliation against a Soviet attack would be in the West's interest.

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I apologize for having written at such length, but I believe the importance of the subject justifies it. I appreciated the frank expression of views contained in your letter, and I have attempted to reply in the same fashion. I hope we shall have an early opportunity to resume the discussion of this and related matters.

With warmest good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

(signed) John Foster Dulles

John Foster Dulles

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